US Army Corps of Engineers
Jacksonville District

News Release

Release No. 0983
For Release: Nov. 24, 2009
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers begins pulse releases to Caloosahatchee Estuary

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, will begin a fresh water pulse release from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee Estuary at 7 a.m. tomorrow.

The Corps will not discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary through S-80. The last releases made from Lake Okeechobee occurred Aug. 3.

The targeted flow of this release to the Caloosahatchee Estuary is an average flow over 11 days of 450 cubic feet per second (cfs). Water managers will measure flow at the S-79 (W.P. Franklin Lock and Dam), located about 40 miles west of the lake, to ensure that lake flow is reduced by the amount of runoff of from the local basin.

The Corps based its decision to make this release on a number of changing ecological conditions. The pulse release is expected to counteract poor salinity conditions in the upper Caloosahatchee Estuary, and reduce chloride concentrations in the vicinity of the Olga Water Treatment plant.

“A persistent lack of rain over the past several weeks has led to higher salinity levels than we would like to see in the Caloosahatchee Estuary,” said Stu Appelbaum, Deputy for Restoration Program Management. “We will remain sensitive to future water supply needs, but at this time we have determined that releases can improve estuary conditions while having a negligible impact on the lake’s water level.”

After the pulse release is complete, the Corps will reassess the conditions and coordinate closely with the South Florida Water Management District and an array of affected agencies, local governments and stakeholders regarding future actions.

A pulse-type release more closely resembles the naturally occurring pattern of

runoff into the estuary caused by rain, which normally leads to an increase in flow as rain continues to fall, followed by a gradual decrease as runoff comes to an end. Water managers expect these releases to help maintain salinity ranges that are conducive to the sustainability of estuarine organisms in the upper estuary. These releases also benefit the overall ecology of this area by promoting the mixing of salinity levels and nutrient concentrations from one water level to another.

Today, the lake level is 13.61 feet NGVD. The lake is within the Operational Band (Base Flow Sub-Band) of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (2008 LORS). In accordance with the 2008 LORS, releases may be made up to 450 cfs and 200 cfs to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie, respectively. The schedule also allows redistribution of releases to the east and west to minimize impacts or to provide additional benefits.

“Once again we are witnessing the benefits of the flexibility built into the 2008 LORS. We will continue to manage Lake Okeechobee in a way that maintains balance among our missions and the interests of stakeholders,” Appelbaum said.

For more information on water level data and flows for Lake Okeechobee and the Central and Southern Florida Project, visit the Corps’ water management page at http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Divisions/Engineering/Branches/WaterResources/WaterMgt/index.htm.

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